DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 783 SO 018 747

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TITLE Education for Democratic Work and Citizenship: Building Bridges to Organized Labor.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (Chicago, IL, November 4-8, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Citizen Participation; *Citizenship Education; *Democratic Values; *Educational Change; Social Studies; *Unions

ABSTRACT

Members of the educational community have a vested interest in establishng a system of economic decisionmaking that is subject to democratic input and public accountability. Educators might seek alliances with progressive labor unions in order to achieve this goal. This paper explores the roles and effects of capitalism, multinational corporations, labor unions, changing job markets, and the economics of the Reagan administration. The future of the workplace and democracy may be linked to the quality of social studies education, and citizenship education must be promoted by groups outside of the educational field, such as organized labor. Educational reform cannot succeed without becoming part of a larger socio-political movement, and organized labor's best long-term interests lie in solidarity with educators who seek a participatory democracy. (JHP)

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Education For Democratic Work And Citizenship: Building Bridges To Organized Labor

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Fall 1987

SO 018 747

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INTRODUCTION

Without claiming tight causal relationships between the economy and "superstructural" institutions such as schools, there is broad agreement concerning the centrality of economic factors to any authentic understanding of social, political, educational, etc. phenomena. The relationships between the economy and other societal categories or sectors, becomes more obvious during profound sea changes movement. We are experiencing such basic and radical alterations in the world economy during this historical period, and especially since around 1970. Because most - or all - of the profound economic changes have been made non-democratically, the effect of these dislocations upon schools, politics, work, etc. must be studied in special ways. Within the Social Foundations of Education field(s) there is occurring a whole host of critical studies which seek to establish the relationship between the sea changes in economics, and the so-called educational reform movement of the 1980s. In fact, one of the main discourses which is occurring within Social Foundations is focused upon the central importance of the economy and work under capitalism, in relation to education and schooling.

Carnoy and Levin's, Schooling and Work in the Democratic State (1985) can be seen as the most recent book-length analysis of the relationship between the power of the economy, and education, within the schools. One might look to Bowles and Gintis' landmark Schooling in Capitalist America (1976) as a starting systematic analysis which was widely read by Foundations scholars. Beyond this discourse within

our field(s) lies the larger one which has always recognized the massive power of the economy to influence, and/or control, less powerful sectors of society. This recognition lies at the heart of modern leftist analysis - whether Marxist or not. We in Education have our own tradition which goes back at least to Dewey, which shares in the broader recognition of the dangers intrinsic to an economy which is neither democratically planned, nor executed.

Members of the educational community have a vested interest in establishing a system of economic decision-making which is subject to democratic input and public accountability. We educators and scholars who have such a vested interest must seek allies throughout our own society, and beyond, from among those who share our positions and beliefs, so that we can act within broad progressive democratic coalitions for authentic reform/change. One of the groups with whom educators can seek natural alliances are progressive labor unions. Educators who see their main goal as preparing young persons for the possibility of democratic empowerment, civic responsibility, and the necessary courage, logically, must be concerned with the worlds of work these students will enter into one day. We educators must view the importance of meaningful work as a good in itself, and as an integral part of authentic citizenship. Our students and workers who require union protection have been among the most adversely affected groups during this period of economic sea changes under the direction of monopoly capitalism, and their allies in government. We must turn our attention to a brief description of the economic sea changes.

I

The anarchic nature of capitalism, and its fundamentally non-democratic nature, has given rise to corporate power which in many cases acts as a private government(s). The current form of corporate power is of course the multinational one; morever, it is most responsible for the economic upheavals we now experience. The anarchic features of the international development are obvious to all who bother to study capital's penetration into new markets and countries. Robert Heilbroner connects the anarchic role of modern capitalism to the role of the multinationals when he reminds us that our experience has been to live in

> a world continuously in imbalance - monetary ... trade ... resources ... developmental imbalance[s]. And this imbalance will continue - despite the best efforts of governments to patch up or offset its more dangerous manifestations - as long as the economic unfolding of world history is left to the stimulus of private accumulation. That is the anarchy of capital today ....[1]

Manuel Castels believes that we are living in an economic crisis whose causes are social. The social relations which support capitalist production and accumulation have been disrupted and challenged in such a way as to lay bare the structural basis of the social crisis. According to Castells, a structural crisis is one where it becomes impossible to expand or reproduce the system without a transformation or reorganization of the basic characteristics of production, distribution, and management, and their translation into different kinds of social organizations.[2] The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of the deterioration of American hegemony in economic, political, military, and social terms. The defeat in Vietnam is the most spectacular example of the deterioration. In addition to problems abroad,

it appeared for a time that Western capitalist societies had lost a good deal of control over, and allegiance of, members of their own people. The radical action by American, French, Italian, and German youth frightened the establishments in those countries.

Robert Kuttner has explained the cause of America's hegemonic deterioration this way: growth expired because the economic spending boom which was fueled by World War II, and then by European recovery, mass consumer spending, and the automobile age finally played themselves out. A combination of saturated consumer spending on the demand side, plus heightened global competition on the supply side, have been the main causes of the stagnation beginning in the 1970s.[3] The economic sea changes being described are characterized by the deterioration of the Pax Americana abroad, and by the tearing apart of the pact between labor and capital at home.

The pact between popular forces and capital in the developed core countries, including the United States, featured a significant redistribution of wealth, power, and access, all of which were importantly caused by a weakening of the disciplinary power within worker-boss relations. The social welfare institutions which were put into place during the earlier structural world crisis of the 1930s were kept in place - and even improved upon - during and after World War II.[4] One might say that capital was forced to validate and sanction in law the gains achieved by labor in the workplace. However, it was not the case that capital has ever accepted American labor as a co-determining partner in formulating economic macro-policy. Capital continued to exercise hegemony, in spite of gains made by popular forces; however, in spite of this fact, capital was responsible for declaring

war on the gains which were so painstakingly achieved by popular forces. By the time of Thatcher's victory in Britain, and Reagan's taking the presidency in 1980, we witnessed a new class war, one launched by capital and their allies against the achievements that have been commonly called the welfare state.[5] The 1970s were a time of deepening conflicts between state capitalist interests and human needs. The 1945-1970 pact between labor and capital had been based upon the high wages and security of the workers in the mass production industries - in conjunction with high profits and capital's right to control work according to management priorities. After 1970, the system began to experience crucial structural problems. Job markets began to divide more drastically into relatively high-paid unionized workers and low-paid non-union ones. Capital continues to bring pressure to lower wages, but this has not solved the imbalance between supply and demand. Furthermore, "Despite the emerging technologies, governments have not devised a new, sustainable macroeconomic order that will translate industrial breakthroughs into broad prosperity."[6]

We have undergone a transformation to a service economy, and this has occurred under the aegis of capitalism. This transformation has profound consequences for the organization of American society. In the first place, the new jobs mostly provide employment for women. Secondly, these jobs in eating and drinking places, health services, and business services offer short hours. Third, the hourly pay is low. Fourth, the new positions are mostly dead-end jobs. Fifth, these new service jobs rarely enjoy union protection. This sea change in employment is toward the nonproductive sectors of work; moreover, many of the new jobs are subsumed under the frivolous consumer mart

of advanced decadent capitalism. These jobs support the fundamental assertion of contemporary capitalism that the primary requirement for individual self-fulfillment and happiness is the possession and consumption of consumer goods. Furthermore, these new jobs make a mockery of the contention that human beings develop their personhood through authentic work - through the individual and collective transformation of recalcitrant matter.

The recent economic changes have featured a spectacular rise in supervisorial labor. Mike Davis has said, that although blue-collar employment has fallen by 12 percent since the onset of the 1980 recession, by December of 1982 there were nearly 9 percent more managers and administrators working in the American economy.[7] A concomitant occurrence has been the creation of an "overconsumptionist" group. Davis refers to the steady political subsidization of a sub-bourgeoisie - a mass layer of managers, professionals, new entrepreneurs, and rentiers, who, faced with the rapidly declining ability of the working class (including the working poor, the unemployed, and the minorities) to defend themselves during the 1970s and 80s, have been overwhelmingly successful in profitting from inflation and state targeted expenditures.[8] These events are to be understood as attempts to shore up the hegemony of capital.

Predictably, the current version of the arms race has been the most important impetus in "economic recovery" under Reaganism. Military spending is highly compatible with the purposes of contemporary capitalism because it does not interfere with existing areas of profit making. Furthermore, it does not challenge the class structure, nor does it seriously affect income redistribution possibilities. Reliance

on sophisticated weapons systems leads to an "all power to the experts" condition which further weakens democratic participation.

Finally, we come to a specific look at the Reagan administration's role in the economic sea changes in the American, and world economies. James Tobin has written of the attempted Reagan counterrevolution,

> The economic program of the Reagan administration ... manifests a counterrevolution in the theory, ideology, and practice of economic policy. The aim of the counter-revolution is to shrink the economic influence of the government, especially the central government, relative to that of private enterprise and free markets.[9]

The administration has made it clear that the problem of inequality is no longer a concern of the federal government. It has attempted a redistribution of wealth upwards. Although the rhetoric of the Reagan alliance is anti-statist, the real goal has been to bring the state even more solidly in on the side of capital - and to remove its support from the left coalition and the welfare state.[10] Instead of a diminution of state spending, there has occurred a restructuring of it toward defense, as we have seen, and in order to expand the frontiers of entrepreneurship and rentier opportunity. The Reagan administration, and its congressional allies, have made possible huge profits and salary increases for those who command the heights of corporate power.

An important part of the economic sea changes has been the effective reaction by the haves in America against the real, and perceived, gains by minorities, union members, working poor, etc. Reaction by the haves moved from mere defense of socio-economic inequalities to shrewd strategies for upward redistribution of power and income through shifting tax burdens, and by removing obstacles to the exploitation

of cheap labor. Emma Rothschild presents an interesting judgement of Reaganism.

> What remains, after this expedition through political conclusions ... premises, and economic conclusions of the Reagan administration's bold explanation for the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s? ... They amount to little more than a macroeconomic veil of modesty for the administration's political objectives: to redistribute income and well-being toward the rich and away from the poor; to redistribute health and education and security toward much the same people who could have enjoyed them before the New Deal, or before the [new conservative] Gotha Program.[11]

Our description and analysis has focused upon: the anarchic characteristics of capitalism; the role of multinational corporations; the social and structural nature of the crisis; the deterioration of U.S. hegemony; the weakness of organized labor; and management's assault on its old pact with labor; capital's reaction to pre-1970 victories by labor and popular forces; the emergence of "overconsumptionism" by a deliberately created and supported group/class; the predominance of low-wage jobs among those which were generated since 1970; the key role of defense spending in U.S. economics; and finally, Reaganism. Let us turn our attention to a non-deterministic concept of correspondence in order to better explain the relationship between the economic sea changes and education.

II

This section on correspondence will be very brief because of space limitations.[12] If the principle of correspondence does not operate in a fashion claimed by iron-clad determinists, the fact remains that the power of the economy at this time in history can be said to exercise a singularly most important influence upon the rest of the culture. There are powerful carry-overs from the dynamic economy to institutions which are not as powerful - institutions which are part of the superstructure. Although it is true that various sectors of contemporary culture in the United States, and in other developed countries, are relatively autonomous and have dialectical relationships with each other, and the economy; it is not true that these sectors, and the actors within them, can operate as though those who control the command heights of the economy are not in charge of the rules by which the interaction occurs. There does exist contested terrain upon which non-determined historical actors struggle against one another, but the advantage within the capitalist system has been on the side of capital. While there is no guaranteed outcome, there is causation. There does exist correspondence and some forms of causality between what occurs at the economic (substructural) level, and the other sectors of this complex culture(superstructure). I do not think it is crucial to be definitive concerning the exact relationship between the brute power of the economy and principle economic decision makers, vis-à-vis the other cultural sectors. What is crucial is to recognize theoretically what is clear to almost everyone who bothers to study, or notice, what occurs in the modern world. What is clear is that

> Authority in a capitalist system typically resides in two realms: state and market. Of these, the coercive power of the market is more indirect and elusive than that of the state. Despite its ostensibly private character, however, it must be understood as a dominant political factor. For the logic of capitalism as an economic system spills over into far-flung social and cultural spheres, subjecting even noneconomic relationships to the utilitarian criteria and social discipline of commodity and exchange. "The market needs a place," wrote the late liberal economist Arthur Okun, "and the market needs to be kept in its place.' But ... [as Robert Heilbroner has said] the essence of capitalism is that the market won't stay in its place.[13]

Michael Apple has written in his Ideology and Curriculum (1979), that there exists a version of determination - and correspondence - which views these terms as a complex nexus of relationships which, in their final moments, are economically rooted but exerting pressures and setting limits on cultural practice, including schools. Therefore, the cultural sphere is not a "mere reflection" of economic practices, but "... is mediated by the specific activities, contradictions, and relationships among real men and women - as they go about their day-to-day lives in the institutions which organize their lives."[14] While granting that schools are part of a semi-autonomous sector in an advanced society like the United States, Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin write in their Schooling and Work in the Democratic State (1985), that both the structure and content of certain educational reform "... tend to correspond to particular changes in the workplace, and that some are more likely to be adopted than others."[15] In Apple's review of Schooling and Work in the Democratic State he claims that Carnoy and Levin's return to the economic problematic of the 1970s is warranted, especially in view of the real economic crisis of today. Apple claims that Carnoy and Levin's analysis "... privileges economic

'causes' over others."[16] The current discourse carried on by those who see schools and education in relational terms is a discourse framed in economic language and concepts. Because of the profound sea changes which have occurred in the economy, those of us who think relationally about education are justified and correct to place economic considerations at center stage.

Many of the cultural claims concerning the relative autonomy of actors in autonomous, or quasi-autonomous, contexts must be critically reviewed as a result of the enormous consequences experienced by persons (actors) within these superstructural contexts. These arguments which seek to establish the autonomy of actors within the interstices of what many had thought was a one-dimensional society may have to be studied more rigorously during a time when these so-called interstices seem very narrow indeed. We cannot, must not, go back to mechanistic concepts of deterministic causality with regards to our views on correspondence. The scholarship already done concerning how hegemony must be continuously reimposed upon resisting actors is crucial to understanding how anti-democratic forces continue to make the democratic potential non-realizable in countries like our own. However, the fact that this hegemony <u>is</u> mainly still in place is due importantly to the reality of the correspondence principle. The advantage lies with those who make macroeconomic decisions. The contesting parties do not fight on equal ground, nor with equal power. We are witnessing the brute manifestations of this unequal contestation since circa 1970, in the capitalist West. The economic sea changes within the substructure have had corresponding consequences upon superstructural institutions, like the schools. Schools and

other institutions in a pluralist society seek to accomodate themselves to economic change - economic change which is caused mainly by the few, and with profits as the motive.[17] The argument forwarded in this section on correspondence is not deterministic in the sense of non-human forces dictating to men and women. Instead, it is the age-old story of certain persons exerting their wills for their own "bottom line" interests, instead of pro bono publico, or for the good and welfare of the whole public.

In summary, the correspondence principle is still a useful one which enables us to understand the link between what occurs in the substructural economy, and the superstructural school. Specifically, a non-mechanistic determinist version of correspondence allows us to understand the educational, or school, ramifications of the powerful sea changes that have occurred since circa 1970. Recent scholarship has establisned that superstructural institutions do exercise significant autonomy. We know that schools are contested sites. Historical actors do in fact act. There does exist empirical evidence of agency so that determinism is properly discredited; however, "We should remember that these resistances occur on terrain established by capital ..."[18]

III

The title of this paper states that it is concerned with building bridges to organized labor. I wish to deal with this conceptually instead of strategically, tactically, or prescriptively. Because of the nature of educators' work, as related to work in the broadest sense within this capitalist-dominated status quo, there are natural alliances to be built among workers of all kinds. Furthermore, education workers, as well as workers in other industries all have a possible common interest in what kinds of social, political, and economic worlds the young will be likely to enter. The current attempts by many progressive unions to challenge the offensive onslaught by capital, especially since 1970, is not unrelated to calls for democratic empowerment, civic education, etc. within education. A common recognition has emerged after this onslaught, Reaganism, and the constitutional crisis called "Iran-Contra-gate" - among other occurrences - that American democracy itself is at risk.

The basic business unionism model followed by American labor after 1945 saw workers being able to share in the growing material richness of this society; however, the price paid was management's continued control of the worlds of work, and the relationship of the particular industry to the larger economy. The leaders of organized labor, with some notable exceptions, were satisfied to deliver wage and fringe benefits increases to the rank and file within a seemingly ever-expanding capitalist economy; unfortunately, there was no serious attempt to challenge management's exclusive decision-making powers dealing with investment, product design, actual control of the workplace, introduction of technology, and the exportation

of capital abroad through the dramatic increase of the multinational corporations. Organized labor came to realize that it was in serious trouble during the 1970s and 80s because it had not radically (to the root) challenged capital's right to make the most important decisions governing the factory, enterprise, industry, and the economy. Organized labor also discovered that liberals were not always ready to stand by unions when the political going got tough. To say it another way, organized labor is in deep trouble today because of the weakness of American democracy.

Let us take a conceptual look at how and why democracy is weak in this country, in spite of its formal trappings. Our political system is based upon one adult-one vote, and this is considered democratic; although it is a representative system. Our social system is finally based upon egalitarian principles; however, the economic system is based upon hierarchy and bossism. In fact, the most serious weakness of American democracy is that the majority cannot, in most cases, bring public democratic power to bear upon economic decision-making. Quite selfish men make economic decisions which affect the whole American people, but these men are answerable mainly to "bottom line" profit-making. It could be plausibly argued that the election(s) of Ronald Reagan resulted from the demise of a liberal electoral majority which never become radical enough to bring the economy under democratic control. Liberalism was discredited; therefore, an anti-public, anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, anti-labor, anti-education, saber-rattling primitive (with high-tech dress) "conservativism" came to power. An alert, politically aware, radical labor movement - within a larger coalition of persons

insisting that economic decisions be made in a publically accountable way - could have prevented the crisis which has engulfed us since 1970.

Broad democratic coalition politics are always tough to create and maintain. Having granted the difficulty, it can be documented that one of the dominant consequences of schooling in the United States has been to produce a majority that has neither been taught, nor has learned, how to act as critically aware citizens within a participatory democracy. Too many of our graduates of various levels of schooling are sophisticatedly taught to be loyal to a system which may not be in their best interests - one that should be democratically altered to serve all of us. Many persons who work at jobs where they need union protection and representation have not been those who were well-served by a school system which is characterized by many inherent and systematic biases against the working class, minorities, etc. An important part of schooling in America has been to select and sort students for a highly unequal and unfair world of work. It is well known that those who have had the natural advantages within the schools have been, for the most part, the sons and daughters of the comfortable upper middle-class. It has been these graduates who have come to be the writers, journalists, professors, executives, jurists, government officials, "blue ribbon" panelists, i.e. those who shape and form public opinion and maintain the hegemony of capital. It could be argued that the popular forces, including organized labor, have not been able to make their theoretical (de jure) democratic power real (de facto) because they have not been educated to believe that such an accomplishment is possilbe!

Democratic power can be fulfilled when it can direct the economy in the name of the public interest; only then will it be possible to have workplace, industrial, economic democracy. Educators must see the crucial importance of this possibility.[19]

There has always been pressure from owners, bosses, capitalists, et al. to separate being a good worker from being able to excercise citizenship rights. However, the terms citizen and worker must be thought of as a natural unity in order to promote the conversion of our de jure democracy into a de facto one. The terms citizen and worker must be thought of as a natural unity in order to promote the making of an authentically democratic society. Men and women who work are involved daily in transforming the material and social contexts within which they labor. The citizen-worker must also have the freedom and power to individually, and/or collectively, transform the physical/social/political/economic/cultural world. The pattern of praised work which is being presented here is one characterized by freely associated historical actors who do not leave their vital concerns, and personalities "on hold", or in the vestibule, as they enter the workplace. Citizen-workers as opposed to "hands", "staff", or "personnel", are <u>persons</u> who enjoy freedom and autonomy within their workplaces - freedom which is limited only by demands of craft, profession, or public responsibility. The coming together of freely associated citizen-workers within a workplace which is itself situated within a larger democratic community is the highest social, economic, political, and educational good (<u>summum bonum</u>).

Because opinion-making and education are so important in a so-called "information society", organized labor must come to see the

importance of creating a favorable climate of opinion within contemporary America. The future of workplace, industrial, or even economic democracy may be linked to what kind of social studies instruction young people receive, and interact with, within our public schools. Furthermore, our public colleges and universities must be seen by organized labor as the crucially important makers of public opinion which they are in fact.[20]

Critical educators who are interested in "Good Education For The Worker/Citizen And Democratic Participation",[21] have always known that education must be desired, understood and fought for by more than just teachers. Authentic school reform which is committed to education for democratic empowerment must be linked in solidarity with persons and groups who seek to democratize American society. Educational reform can not succeed without being part of a larger socio-political movement. I believe that organized labor's best long-term interests lie in solidarity with critical educators who also seek a good society which is both a community and a participatory democracy. This paper's title makes it clear that critical educators should seek solidarity with the labor movement.

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[19]The first part of section III was originally thought through for, Richard A. Brosio, "The Current Industrial/Economic Crisis and The Weakness of American Democracy," The Labor Beacon 36, 6 (December 1986): 3.

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